

# State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



## PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Testimony before the  
Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Leslie Gabel-Brett, Ph.D.  
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Thursday, February 18, 2005

### Re: Election Day Registration and Campaign Finance Reform

Good afternoon Senator DeFronzo, Representative Caruso, and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of **S.B. 59, An Act Concerning Election Day Voter Registration** that would allow people to register to vote and cast ballots on the day of a primary, regular state or municipal election.

One of the statutory missions of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is to increase the representation of women in all levels of government. We believe that includes increasing the participation of women as voters. That is why we are here to support election day registration. We believe that any fair and reasonable measure that reduces the barriers to voting should be embraced, because we need everyone's voice in our democracy. Women often juggle multiple responsibilities between work and family and, in a poll conducted two years ago, a majority of women reported that *time* was the thing they needed most to make their family lives better. Permitting election day registration and voting encourages every eligible voter, whether juggling one or two jobs, childcare and household responsibilities, to make one trip to the polls on election day to make his or her voice heard.

**The evidence shows that this strategy works to increase voter participation. Six states currently allow their citizens to register and vote on Election Day (Minnesota, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Maine, Idaho, and New Hampshire) and voter participation and registration rates are significantly higher in these states. In the 2000 election, Election Day Registration (EDR) states had significantly higher voter participation**

**and registration rates than the national average. The rate of voter participation was 59.47% nationally and 58.3% in Connecticut, whereas the average in EDR states was 68.22%.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Demos. *Tools for Democracy "Election Day Registration,"* June 2002. CT statistics - Democracy Works. *Election Day Registration Fact Sheet*, 2001.

The rate of voter registration was 69.51% nationally and 75% in Connecticut, whereas the average in EDR states was 77.08%.<sup>2</sup>

**Many residents learn about candidates during the last two weeks prior to Election Day because that is the time with greatest concentration of advertising and election news coverage. EDR is one step in the process to greater civic engagement through voting. As citizens become more educated and interested in their civic duty at election time, EDR would encourage and promote voter participation for all citizens and reduce the barriers that hinder voter turnout.**

**This committee is also considering several proposals regarding campaign financing, including proposal to permit public financing of campaigns at the state-wide and municipal level. We believe that Campaign Finance Reform will help to level the playing field for potential candidates and help to increase the representation of women in government. As you know, women still represent only 28% of elected officials in our state legislature: 44 of 151 state representatives, or 29% are women; and 9 of 36 state senators, or 25% are women. In the past two election cycles, there has been no increase in the representation of women in the General Assembly.**

There are many reasons why women are under-represented in government, but one important reason is that we have less access to money. As wage earners, we still earn only 75% of what men earn, overall. We are still grossly under-represented as officers and board members of major corporations, and therefore have less access to major contributors. When women decide to run for office – when they plan or imagine a career in politics – they face serious economic disadvantages.

Campaign finance reform will remove some of the disadvantages facing women and other low- or moderate-income individuals who want to serve as elected officials. Experiences in states with public financing of elections demonstrate the effect. According to a report prepared by the Connecticut Citizen Action Group, there was a 8.5% increase in the number of women who ran for office in Maine between 1998 and 2002, when their “Clean Elections” law took effect. Similarly, there was a 27% increase in the number of women who ran for office in Arizona between 1998 and 2002 after that state’s campaign finance reform laws took effect.

We urge you to support measures that open up the political process so that more people participate as voters and candidates, and those that level the playing field for women and others with less access to financial resources. This will increase the representation of women and strengthen our democracy.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

